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ABSTRACT

The major purposes of this paper are to present (1) a summary of the major concepts and general hypotheses of the social power model, (2) the empirical findings from the operationalization of the social power model, and (3) some implications for change agents concerned with rural development. The social power model was empirically tested in 5 rural Iowa communities, all of which have a population greater than 500 people. The field procedures for identifying power actors in the communities involved interviews with (1) external community knowledgeables, (2) internal community knowledgeables, and (3) power actors. Information from interviews with 92 power actors was analyzed by reference to 8 general hypotheses. Implications for change agents include the following ideas: knowledge of power actors and the power structure may be helpful, power structures are likely to be more polymorphic as the size of the community increases, power actors may not be holding positions of authority, and a knowledge of role is important. (PS)

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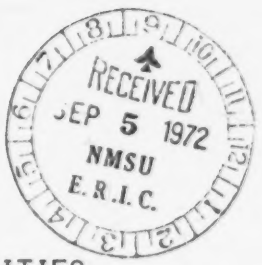

POWER STRUCTURES IN FIVE RURAL MIDWESTERN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

Most agents of change, including those concerned with rural development, recognize that some community members play more important roles than others in the process of community decision-making. If rural development goals are to be achieved, it is vital that change agents have knowledge and understanding of the people who can affect the community decision-making processes.

In 1962, the research team of rural sociologists at Iowa State University initiated a research project in the area of community power structures.[1] This research project involved the development of a theoretical framework for the purposes of guiding research on power structures in community and county social systems. The social power model has been operationalized in five rural communities located in Iowa ranging in size from approximately 600 to 5,000.

The social power model also provides an analytical model or framework which change agents may use in analyzing community power structures. In addition to the research utility of the social power model, the research team has provided some implications for change agents based on the operationalization of the social power model. These implications have been provided in various research monographs, professional papers, unpublished doctoral dissertations, and unpublished masters theses.[2]

There are three major purposes of this paper. First, a summary of the major concepts and general hypotheses of the social power model are presented. Second, the empirical findings from the operationalization of the social power model in five Iowa communities are summarized. Third, some implications for change agents concerned with rural development are provided based upon the empirical findings.

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A SOCIAL POWER MODEL

The research team of rural sociologists at Iowa State University delineated and defined a social power model. The model was developed for studying social power in community and county social systems. Only a brief summary of the major concepts and the general hypotheses are presented here.

Social power

Social power is defined as the capability to control the behavior of others. In social systems such as communities, the ability to influence the behavior of others is differentially distributed among people. Social power is not randomly distributed among the community's population.

Sources of social power are the various bases which give a power actor the capability to control the behavior of others. The sources of social power may be categorized into two major components of social power, namely authority and influence.

Authority is the capability to control the behavior of others as determined by the members of the social system. Established authority always resides in a status-role and not in the individual as such.

Influence is that capability to control the behavior of others which is not formally designated in the authority component of the status-role. Influence results from the fact that certain individual actors get into a superordinate position in relation to others because of their ability to exert their wills in relation to these subordinates and to bring sanctions to bear in ways which are beyond the authority given to them by the system if the subordinates do not conform to their wills. The capability of an actor (or actors) to influence others may reside in the individual actor and his facilities, but it does not reside in a formalized status-role of the specific system. Some examples of facilities which give the actor the capability to influence others are human relations skills, intelligence, wealth, control of mass media, reputation, religious affiliation and status within the church, family prestige, and past achievements.

Power actors

Power actors are the actors of the social system who are perceived to have social power and affect the community decision-making processes. They are perceived to have more social power than other actors with which to affect community decisions. The social power which community power actors have may depend upon the interaction of various sources of social power.

Power structure

A power structure is that pattern or relationships among individuals which enables the individuals possessing social power to act in concert to affect the decision-making of the social system on a given issue area. To clarify the concept, individuals working separately toward a common goal in the social system without communication among the individuals does not constitute a power structure.

The expected logical relationships among some of the concepts of the social power model were stated as general hypotheses. The eight general hypotheses which were derived and operationalized were:

G.H. 1 Community actors will perceive that social power exists in the social system.

G.H. 2 Power actors will exercise social power to affect the outcomes of community issue areas.

G.H. 3 Power actors in different communities will have similar personal and social characteristics.

G.H. 4 Power actors will have a structure in their interpersonal relations.

G.H. 5 Power structures will vary by issue area.

G.H. 6 Power actors perceived to have more social power will have no more authority than power actors perceived to have less social power.

G.H. 7 Power actors will perceive some sources of social power as being more relevant than others for social power in the general affairs of the social system.

G.H. 8 There will be an expected set of role performances to be fulfilled which are associated with the accumulation of social power by actors in the social system.

METHODOLOGY

The social power model was empirically tested in five rural Iowa communities. Four of the five communities, Cornerville, Annville, Oak Town, and Center Town are located in South County in southern Iowa.** These four communities represent all the communities which have a population greater than 500 in the county. Prairie City, the largest community in Midwest County, is located in north central Iowa.

The population of these communities for 1960 and 1970 is presented in Table 1. During the past decade Cornerville and Center Town increased in population, while the remaining three communities declined in population.

Table 1. Population of five rural communities by selected periods**

Community	County	Total Population 1960	Total Population 1970	1960-70 % Change
Cornerville	South	638	679	5.5
Annville	South	692	643	-7.1
Oak Town	South	1,117	931	-16.7
Center Town	South	1,687	1,745	3.4
Prairie City	Midwest	4,501	4,376	-2.8

**Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

Field procedures

The field procedures for identifying power actors in each of the five communities involved three phases. They included interviews with (1) external community knowledgeables, (2) internal community knowledgeables, and (3) power actors.

*Throughout this paper the names of communities and counties are pseudonyms.

External community knowledgeables

During the first phase, external community knowledgeables (persons living outside the community who were perceived to have a general knowledge of the community) were interviewed to provide (1) names of persons living within the community who would have a broad knowledge of community decision-making processes and power actors, (2) background information on past and present community issues, and (3) names of persons whom they perceived to be power actors.

Internal community knowledgeables

During the second phase, internal community knowledgeables (persons perceived by the external community knowledgeables as having a broad knowledge of the community decision-making processes and other knowledgeables found in the community) were interviewed. They represented various occupations which included educators, farmers, newspaper editors, laborers, politicians, businessmen and government officials. A formal schedule was used during the interviews with the internal community knowledgeables. The internal community knowledgeables schedule was designed to obtain names of persons perceived to have social power in various community issue areas. These issue areas included general affairs, business and industry, county hospital, county courthouse, education, business promotion, recreation, government, obtaining farmer support and those persons the internal community knowledgeables indicated they would talk to about a new idea to increase business in the community.

Power actors

Community actors receiving an arbitrarily established number of mentions by the internal community knowledgeables were designated as the pool of power actors in each community. In the third phase, the power actors were asked to add names of community actors whom they believed should be on the rating scale lists. They were asked to add the names of persons in the community whom they perceived to have as much or more social power than those on the rating scale lists. The number of power actors in each of the five communities who were delineated and interviewed is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of power actors delineated and interviewed in each of the five communities

Community	Number Delineated	Number Interviewed
Cornerville	18	16
Annville	16	14
Oak Town	22	19
Center Town	18	18
Prairie City	26	25
TOTAL	100	92

One-hundred power actors were delineated in the five communities. Of this total interviews were obtained with 92 power actors. A formal field schedule was used during the interviews.

FINDINGS

The final section of this paper summarizes the findings of the operationalization of the social power model in five rural Iowa communities. The findings for each of the eight general hypotheses are summarized below.

G.H. 1 Community actors will perceive that social power exists in the social system.

In each of the five communities, the empirical data supported the general hypothesis that community actors will perceive that social power exists in the social system. In each of the communities studied, both the community knowledgeables and the power actors perceived that the people within the community had differential social power with which to control the community's decision-making processes.

G.H. 2 Power actors will exercise social power to affect the outcomes of communtiy issue areas.

The general hypothesis that power actors will exercise social power to affect the outcomes of community issue areas was supported in each of the five communities. Although all of the power actors within the power actor pool in each community had not exercised social power in every single specified issue area, some of the power actors within the community power actor pool had exercised social power in each of the issue areas studied. In each of the power actor pools within the five communities, specific instances of the exercise of social power were not provided for some of the power actors regardless of issue areas.

In addition to legitimizing or giving sanction to social action programs, the power actors within the five communities also tended to play leading roles at the execution or implementing stages of social action programs. In contrast to the findings from some of the power studies in large metropolitan areas in which the top power actors bow out after the legitimation stage leaving the execution phases of social action for lower level power actors or an under structure of power, the top power actors in these five rurally-oriented communities played roles at several different stages of social action programs.

G.H. 3 Power actors in different communities will have similar personal and social characteristics.

With the exception of differences in income of the power actors among the five communities, the empirical data supported the general hypothesis that power actors in different communities will have similar personal and social characteristics.

The 91 power actors had an average age of 49.2 years. The average formal educational level achieved by the power actors in the five Iowa communities was 13.8 years. The power actors as a group had formal education beyond the high school level. They had similar occupations in each of the five communities although some professionals appeared in the power actor pool in the three largest communities while no professionals were among the power actors in the two smallest communities. Approximately 63 percent of the 91 power actors were engaged in business, 10 percent in government, 9 percent in agriculture, 7 percent in professional occupations,

6 percent in communications, 2 percent in education, and 3 percent in other occupations. Businessmen (including bankers) were found to predominate among the power actors in each of the five communities.

The average gross family income of the 91 power actors was $11,291. The average gross family income ranged from a low of $7,179 in Annville to $16,000 in Center Town. These differences in the average gross family income of power actors in the five communities may be due to differences in the occupational structures of the communities. Since the two largest communities (which had the higher average gross family incomes) had larger retail businesses and more wholesale distributors than the smaller communities and provided specialized government, medical, and legal services which were unavailable in the smaller communities, the two largest communities had higher income occupations within their occupational structure. Representatives from among these higher income occupations (lawyers, doctors, judges, etc.) in the two largest communities were among the community actors delineated as power actors.

The power actors tended to have similar political orientations. Fifty-five percent, or 50 of the 91 power actors, were either conservative or liberal Republicans, while nearly 20 percent were Democratic in their political orientations. Approximately 25 percent listed their political orientation as Independent. The power actors tended to be Republican in their political orientation. The average length of years of residence of the 91 power actors in their communities was 31.3 years.

G.H. 4 Power actors will have a structure in their interpersonal relations.

Within the power actor pool in each of the five communities, the power actors had a structure in their interpersonal relations. Certain power actors interacted more highly with each other through informal coffee groups than they did with other power actors. In addition to having informal coffee group patterns, certain power actors interacted more highly with each other through home visiting than they did with other power actors. In one community (Prairie City) certain power actors generally had patterns of agreement on community issues. There were

also patterns of disagreement on community issues among certain power actors. These empirical data supported the general hypothesis that power actors will have a structure in their interpersonal relations.

G.H. 5 Power structures will vary by issue areas.

The general hypothesis that power structures will vary by issue areas was not supported in all five communities. The generalization that power structures will vary by issue areas based on the empirical evidence in the five communities cannot be made.

In the two smallest communities, Cornerville and Annville, the power structures were monomorphic in nature, i.e., the power actors who were perceived to have the most social power in one issue area also tended to have the most social power in other issue areas. These data failed to support the general hypothesis.

There was neither clear-cut support nor rejection of the general hypothesis in the two middle-sized communities, Oak Town and Center Town. While the power structures for some issue areas were monomorphic, the power structures for other issue areas tended to be polymorphic, i.e., the power tended to vary from one issue area to the next issue area. The general hypothesis that power structures will vary by issue areas was supported in the largest community, Prairie City. In this community, it was concluded that the power structure was polymorphic.

An intervening variable in the analysis of power structures in the five communities was size of community. The failure to support the general hypothesis that power structures will vary by issue area in the five communities suggested that differences may occur in community power structures by size of community. The empirical data from the five communities tended to support the hypothesis that community power structures are more polymorphic as the size of community increases.

G.H. 6 Power actors perceived to have more social power will have no more authority than power actors perceived to have less social power.

The objective of this general hypothesis was to focus on the relationship of authority and influence as components of community social power. The general hypothesis that power actors perceived to have more social

power will have no more authority than power actors perceived to have less social power was not supported in all five communities. The generalization that the power actors having the most social power in the community would not have held more positions of authority than power actors who had less social power in the community based on the findings in the five communities cannot be made. An intervening variable, community size, appeared to play a role in the relationship of total social power to authority.

In the three smallest communities, the power actors who were perceived to have the most social power in the community decision-making processes generally were the power actors who had served in more positions of authority in the past. In addition, these power actors were generally found to be currently (the time of the interviewing and in the recent past) holding more positions of authority than power actors with less social power in community affairs. Since the power actors having the most social power generally had the most authoritative power, the influence power structure approximated the authoritative power structure in the three smallest communities.

In contrast to the findings in the three smallest communities, the power actors in the two largest communities who were perceived to have the most social power in the community decision-making processes generally were not the power actors who had served in more positions of authority in the past or at the time of the interviewing. Since the power actors having the most social power were generally not the power actors having the most authoritative power, influence played a more important role in total social power than authority in the two largest communities. The informal power structure differed from the authoritative power structure.

G.H. 7 Power actors will perceive some sources of social power as being more relevant than others for social power in the general affairs of the social system.

In each of the five communities, the empirical data supported the general hypothesis that the power actors will perceive some sources of social power as being more relevant than others for social power in the general affairs of the social system. At a general level, the power

actors perceived certain attributes of individuals as being sources which gave individuals social power in the community. The power actors generally perceived the following attributes to be the top ten essentials of a person desiring a position of social power in the community: 1) honesty in dealings, 2) knowledge of things that need to be done in the community, 3) willingness to work, 4) ability to think, 5) ability to organize people, 6) continuing actions to have respect and prestige, 7) past achievements, 8) a wide range of contacts with people, 9) influential positions in community groups, and 10) past participation in community groups.

The power actors in the five communities indicated the attributes of the top power actors in the general affairs of the community which they considered as sources of their social power. The top ten attributes which were considered as sources of social power of the top power actors in general affairs were: 1) ability to think, 2) honesty in dealings, 3) knowledge of things that need to be done in the community, 4) past achievements, 5) past participation in community groups, 6) a wide range of contacts with people, 7) willingness to work, 8) continuing actions to have respect and prestige, 9) kind of occupation, and 10) ability to organize people.

G.H. 8 There will be an expected set of role performances to be fulfilled which are associated with the accumulation of social power by actors in the social system.

The power actors in each of the five communities perceived that there was an expected set of role performances to be fulfilled which were associated with the accumulation of social power in community affairs. The power actors perceived that a newcomer to their communities who desired to become a community power actor in the future needed to fulfill certain roles prior to becoming a community power actor. In addition to these perceptions, the power actors in each community tended to have fulfilled similar roles in the past. These empirical data were accepted as evidence in support of the general hypothesis that there will be an expected set of role performances to be fulfilled prior to becoming a community power actor.

In each community, the power actors were asked to indicate what a relatively young married person who came to the community and established a business should do if he wanted to become a community power actor in the future. Generally, the power actors had similar perceptions of the expected role performances of persons desiring to become community power actors in the future. Generally, the power actors had similar perceptions of the expected role performances of persons desiring to become community power actors in the future. In each community, the power actors tended to name joining and participating in formal organizations as an expected role performance. In one community, Center Town, the power actors indicated that there were certain "right groups" which persons desiring to become community power actors should join. Persons desiring to become community power actors needed to be selective in deciding which organizations to join and participate in.

The power actors tended to have congruence on participating in community affairs and activities as an expected role performance. In three communities the power actors had a relatively high degree of congruency on affiliation with a church as an expected role performance. In one community, Cornerville, the power actors tended to name participating in a church as an expected role performance. The power actors in the five communities tended to have some similar perceptions of expected role performances to be fulfilled prior to becoming a community power actor.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE AGENTS

Change agents concerned with rural development need to be aware that community actors have differential social power with which to affect the community decision-making processes. In determining the roles which power actors may play in present or future community issues, change agents may find that a knowledge of how the power actors have exercised social power in past community issues is helpful.

The knowledge that power actors are likely to be found within certain categories of people may be helpful in identifying the power actors in their communities. Change agents who have a knowledge of the interpersonal relations of the power actors within the community power structure may find this information valuable when initiating and implementing social action programs.

As the size of community increases, change agents are likely to find that power structures are more polymorphic. Although the formal power structure may approximate the community power structure in relatively small communities, change agents cannot assume that the persons of authority in the community are the top power actors.

In large communities change agents are likely to find that the top power actors in the community may not be holding positions of authority in government, governmental agencies, voluntary association or other formal sub-systems within the community. Since the authoritative power structure may differ significantly from the community power structure, change agents may find the process of delineating the power actors who can affect the decision-making processes in different community issue areas a complex process. Powers has suggested a method of identifying the community power structure.[3] His procedure can be useful to the change agent in delineating the top power actors who are not in positions of authority.

The change agent will probably find that the attributes which are most highly related to social power give a power actor influence rather than authority. Change agents need to be aware that the present power actors in community affairs have probably fulfilled an expected set of role performance in the past which enabled them to accumulate their present social power.

The social power model provides a set of concepts and hypotheses which can be used by change agents in analyzing community power structures and their role in rural development. Both the social power model and the procedure suggested by Powers for delineating the top power actors have formed the core content in training change agents in rural development on community power structures. These groups have included agricultural, home economics and youth, extension workers, professional health workers, ministers, educators, community leaders, local government officials, and soil conservationists.

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